Orientation to the Honors Thesis Seminar

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Overview

- What is research?
- What do we do in an honors thesis class?
- What does a strong research proposal look like?
  - Viable Research Question
  - Academic Literature and the Sociological Conversation
  - Methods: Access to Research Sites, Interviewees, Data

- Questions about you
  - What topic is of interest to you?
  - What might be a preliminary research question?
What is research?

Research involves

- Identifying a topic of interest
- Asking a question about it (this is your research question)
- Gathering data through sociological methods to answer your question
  - Methods include
    - Interviews
    - Ethnography
    - Document analyses
    - Statistical analyses
- Writing up your findings
- Findings should add substantive knowledge to your field of inquiry
What We Do in the Thesis Class

Our Expectations

- We understand that for most, this is your first lengthy research project
  - The path of research is not straight and narrow, but a winding road
- Class is designed to structure/guide your journey
  - The research is your own project
  - Intellectually intense experience
Organization of Class

- Research process broken down into smaller steps
  - Assignments due every 2-3 weeks

- First semester assignments:
  - Research statement
    - What is your question
    - Why is it important
  - Annotated bibliography (brief summaries of relevant literature, submitted every 2 weeks)
  - Literature review (what is known about your topic)
  - Research methods (what, how, where)
  - Research prospectus (12-15 page research proposal)
Elements of a Strong Research Proposal

What is a research proposal?

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Initial Research Question

- Most students begin with an interest in a topic
- Initial question may be very broad
- Read! READ!! READ!!!

As you learn more about your topic:
- Ask yourself questions about the topic
- Look for gaps in the literature, e.g.,
  - Is there a question without a satisfactory answer?
  - Is there earlier research that should be updated?
  - Is there research from one context that could be explored in a new context?

- It takes time to narrow an interest in a topic into feasible research question
Viable Research Questions

- Sociologically significant
  - What are the social issues/questions embedded in your research topic?
  - Beware the siren calls of psychology
- Project needs to be empirically grounded
  - Purely theoretical questions are not honors thesis research questions
- Make sure you can find the resources/data to answer your question
- Project can be completed in 9 months
- Project needs 30 - 50 pages to be fully explored
  - Not 10 pages, not 300 pages
- How, Why, What questions are more promising than Do questions
  - Simple, straightforward questions are often the best
- If you think you know the full answer to your research question now, find another question
The Role of Literature In Shaping Your Question

Research question should enter a larger sociological conversation

- What different fields inform your question?
- What do other scholars say about your topic?
- What don’t other scholars say about your topic?
- What is your topic a case of?
  - May frame your research as a case study of a larger issue
- Narrow your question by looking for gaps, silences, inconsistencies/disagreements in the literature
- What are the sociological implications of your topic? (the last step)
Read broadly to figure out what interests you specifically

Talk to a librarian about your topic of interest, get references
Check out the “Subject Librarians” under the “Get Help” tab on the UCB library homepage

- Ann Glusker (Sociology) glusker@Berkeley.edu
- Corliss Lee (Ethnic Studies) clee@library.berkeley.edu
- Lillian Castillo-Speed (Chicanx/Latinx Studies) csl@library.berkeley.edu
- Margaret Phillips (Gender and Women’s Studies) margaret.phillips@berkeley.edu
Methods

- You should have some idea how you will gather the data you need to answer your question
  - Different methods best address different questions
    - Interviews best capture what people think
    - Ethnographic studies best capture what people actually do
- Can you get access
  - To an appropriate site
  - People to interview
    - Precautions for Vulnerable Groups
  - Archival material
  - Data bases
Research and Analysis of Findings Take Place During the Second Semester

- Must complete a research proposal of acceptable quality in H190A to be admitted to H190B
- H190B is a 5-unit class
  - Intensity of work increases
  - Be prepared to take a lighter load of classes or lessen outside commitments
- H190B meets on Tuesdays
Grade based on quality of thesis but also on your class performance

- Attend class (get there on time)
- Timely submission of work
- “Seminar Culture”
  - Collaborative classroom
  - Listen to and respect classmates
  - Take your own and your classmates work seriously
    - Peer editing
Will you enjoy this journey?

- The honors thesis class is a huge commitment!
  - Are you prepared to devote the time the project will need?
  - Are you willing to reduce other commitments?
- Be honest!
If you’re ready for the challenge....

- Submit a preliminary proposal for comment and advice
  - 3 - 5 pages
  - Includes at least 3 academic references
  - Due June 6
- Follow the advice given on your preliminary proposal
- Make an appointment with a librarian
- Final proposal due July 15